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FOX UNVEILS PRODUCTION SUSPENSION FORK--APRIL 5

By Richard Cunningham

On April fifth, with the World Cup venue at Domain Chandon winery as a backdrop, Bob Fox, president of Fox Racing Shox, made a short speech, announcing the company was entering the high-end fork market. Few mountain bike insiders were taken by surprise by the move. For us, it was a question of when, not if.

Fox is the most respected mountain bike shock maker by a huge margin, primarily because of its conservative approach to development and reluctance to over-extend itself. Bob Fox, an engineer who surfed his way into the suspension business in the '70s when motocross racing became a tidal wave in this country, stated that the decision to make front suspension was because of customer demand--and also because he felt that Fox could, "do it better." For the record, he was clear to point out that Fox would not attempt to make a fork for every price level. Instead, they would concentrate on and above the \$1100 range of bicycles for OEM manufacturers, as well as aftermarket sales. Expect to pay between \$400 and \$600 at bike dealers for your personal copies.



FOX

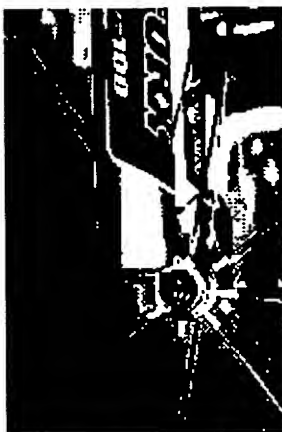
WHAT ABOUT THE FORKS

Fox calls them Forx, and there are two platforms: The Vanilla--a coil/over version targeted at aggressive trail riders and the freeriding set, and the Float--an air-sprung, lighter weight fork for XC buffs. Here are the bullet points:

1--The leader of the Fox Forx development team, Mike McAndrews, said that they couldn't divulge the exact details of the internals because of unresolved patent issues. He did say that both the Vanilla and Float platforms use the same hydraulics. We do know that the damper is an open-bath cartridge in the left side that uses a combination of shim-stacks and bypass circuits to control high- and low-speed damping.

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2--Both the Vanilla and Float models will be offered in three levels, depending upon the damper options: The "R" version stands for rebound control only; the "RL" models offer rebound and a lockout feature; and the "RLC" has a rebound dial, a lockout lever and a compression adjustment ring. All three adjustments are on a concentric shaft on the right fork crown--the red dial on top is rebound, the blue dial with the lever in the center is a lockout control, and the serrated ring on the bottom is the compression clicker.



3--An innovation that has been long in coming is Fox's low speed compression knob. Located on the lower end of the right fork slider, the blue aluminum knob allows you to select the threshold where the lockout valving blows free and allows the fork to move. Without a "blow-off" safety valve, a completely locked out damper would self destruct when you hit a substantial bump. many racers use the blow off circuit as their primary compression damper, because they feel that the fork should only move when it

contacts a big hit. The adjustable blow-off, lends some sophistication to this foolish trend.



4--The forged aluminum crown and cast-magnesium, one-piece sliders are common to all models. The steerers and fork legs are beefier on the longer-stroke models. The legs are 32mm in diameter (that's big)

and constant wall thickness. Fox uses a special hard-anodization process on the legs that retains a film of oil to reduce friction.

5--Color? You won't get a choice here--nor will OEM customers. Fox believes that performance, not gimmicky colors and graphics will communicate their message best. The entire line receives Fox's silver, blue and black logos (exactly like their shocks). Vanilla models are painted black, the Float options are hard anodized--a process that gives them a gold appearance.

6--Travel options are offered in every model. The cross-country Floats will initially offer an 80mm or 100mm option--although a model with 80mm, 100mm, and 125mm is listed in the Fox

information packet. All Vanilla Forx share the 125mm, 100mm, and 80mm options. You cannot alter the travel without disassembling the fork, but Fox says it will be a relatively easy process. Vanilla Forx will sell in the 100mm and 125mm setting. If you really want to squeak around the patch with an 80mm fork, it's up to you to switch it out.

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7--The Float air/oil fork employs a two-stage coil-type negative spring that doubles as a top-out cushion. The negative spring is non-adjustable--unless you are willing to disassemble the fork and replace them (Fox does carry different spring rates). Vanilla Forx use a coil spring in both legs. The left side is adjustable with a preload knob on the crown, or by replacing it with a different rate. The right-side spring is considered a "helper" and is not adjustable.

8--"No plastic." was the war cry at the Fox debut. Fox officials insisted that the damper knobs, preload dial and removable caps were all machined aluminum. Special care was given to make the detent clickers in the fork's various adjustment features feel crisp and drag free.

9--Weight? Well, Fox won't be able to compete with the 2.5-pound RockShox SID Race in this department. Fox claimed their lightest Float model weighs in at 3.57 pounds, the longest travel Vanilla with all the damping control options weighs a claimed, 4.11 pounds. As conservative as Fox is, the production models may actually weigh less than anticipated. When pressed, Bob Fox admitted that an ultra light weight XC version is already in the development stages. Fox did not pursue the title for the lightest fork on the planet because they felt the demand was greatest for a sharp-steering, high-performance trailbike fork. We believe they are right on the money there.

10--Other details that should make potential Fox Forx owners happy are plans to have fork service centers in place throughout the world, that fact that Fox Forx are made right here in the USA, and that almost every item is manufactured in-house at Fox's Watsonville factory. Fox says that they have booked a few OEM customers for 2002 model bikes, and that you should be able to get a fork at our local dealers by mid-July. Our test fork is coming soon, so keep an eye out for a comprehensive test.

For more information, or just to say hello, log onto the Fox website at: www.foxracingshox.com

FOX ADS LOCKOUT TO COIL/ OVER DAMPER

In a move, targeted at the emerging freeride and longer-travel trailbike



movement, Fox developed a coil/over Vanilla shock with the same lockout lever as its popular Float RLC air shock. The Vanilla RLC will deliver a more supple ride, and a more linear feel than the air-sprung version. Fox's Mike McAndrews also noted that softer-long-travel suspension designs benefit more from a lockout that firm XC types.

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